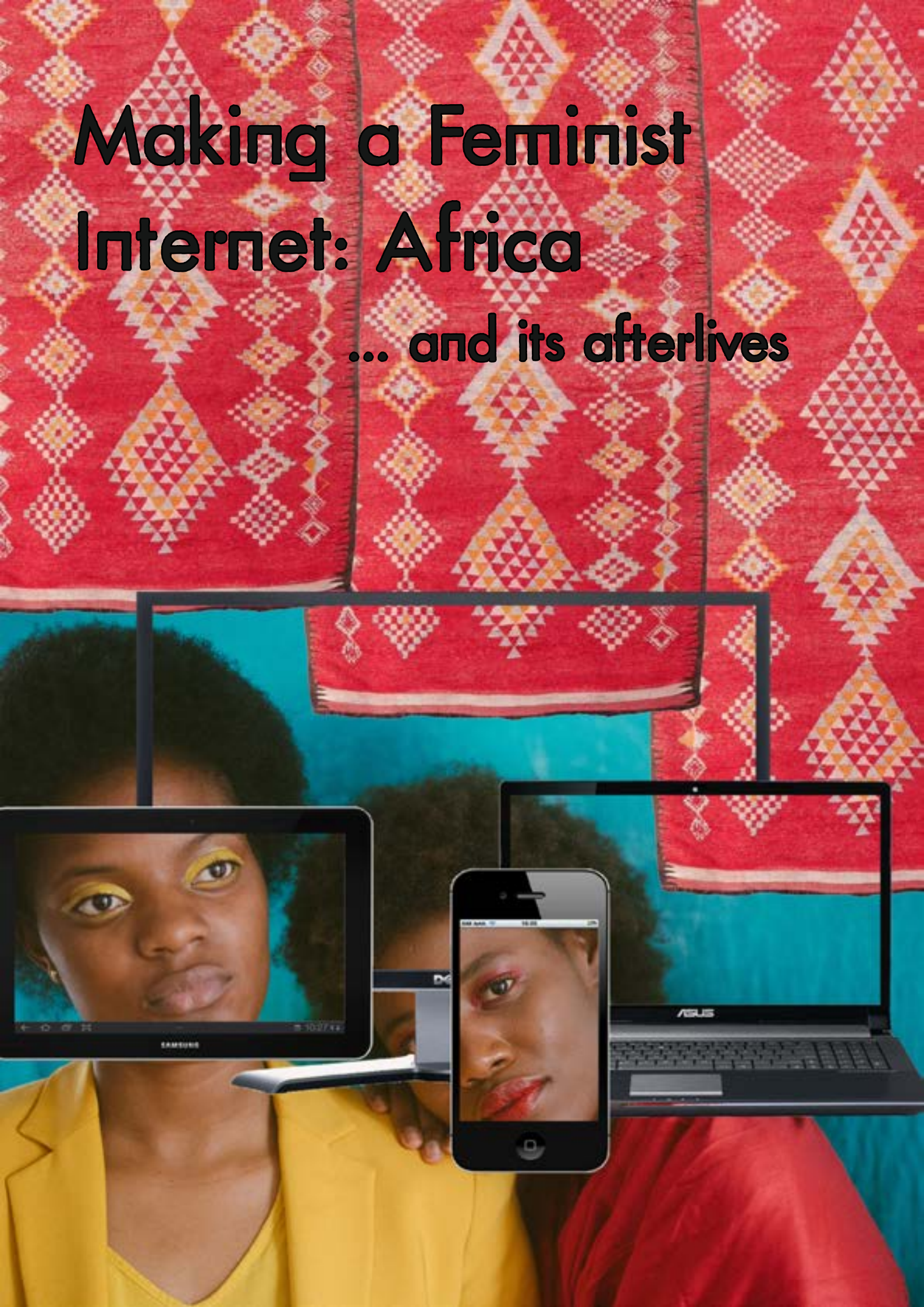
Making a Feminist Internet: Africa

... and its afterlives



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OPENING NOTES

3 August 2020, different time zones, Jitsi video call

Hey friend!

Hiiiii… how are you doing?

[three or four minutes of catch up hyping each other up]

[two or three people trickle into the call]

Hey, how are you guys doing?

I'm doing okay… excited…

Yeah, I'm also a bit curious about how this will go…

Hey… hello? Can you hear me?

We can hear you!

Oh hi everyb—

I think we lost them…

[Twenty five minutes later, finally, finally, we were all here 😄 *]*

Where's Makgosi? Let me text her…

image credit: Freepik.com

We were on Jitsi, a free and open-source video meeting space, for the first feminist learning circle. But even though all of us had either recently started or had long been working from home, Jitsi was new to us, so other suggestions for our future meeting spaces floated about… Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Google Meet, can we handle yet another messaging group in our lives, too?

It was overwhelming. It was exciting. It was brand new and, at the same time, old as our ancestors' bones.

Care work in capitalist societies has always been undervalued and erased, a kind of violence that feels heavier and more amplified — some of this weight is distorted, some of the ruckus is already familiar — during a pandemic. As Jenny Yi-Chen Han and others have noted, Covid-19 has shown us how deeply we are in a crisis of care.

The first edition of the MFI Africa e-zine, an experiment in creative rapporteuring, was a curation of profiles of feminists and feminist movements from different parts of Africa and its diaspora. We published it in the early days of the pandemic in Africa, knowing full well it was a fantastic but unfinished project, an archive in motion. In this edition, we centre the process of thinking towards models of care and repair. We know that there is always more – so much more – to say and do about our lives and afterlives at the intersection of African feminisms, movement-building and accessible and inaccessible technology, and we wanted to see where more extensive conversations could take us when we turned towards our political blindspots, tended to our vulnerabilities with collective care and, with a whole lot of help from our friend and artist, Tiger, explored our creative curiosities through collage.

This edition is therefore a tentative experiment with knowing and unknowing and not-knowing, with form and colour and technology, with ourselves and now, with you. Every week for two months, we gathered around a web of screens, servers, new and old friendships, music breaks and something like a syllabus, but not quite. In these learning circles, we talked about how the internet is as brilliant as it is monstrous; how it felt like it gave us a way into so many worlds, and how, in order to do so, it must eat the world first. Put differently, the internet is modelled after some kind of humanity, and that's exactly the problem, no? Ruth especially emphasised the destructive nature of large-scale resource extraction under capitalism, and in her provocation, she challenges us to imagine what conditions are necessary to support an internet that does not depend on the exploitation of people, land and territories.

Inevitably, we also talked a lot about what it's like to try to keep living during a global pandemic. Because of the way capitalism is set up, the COVID-19 pandemic pushed our labour, including and especially the work we do for money, further into the spaces we eat and sleep and settle for some kind of rest. It's not that we were not already working at home — but working from home was much less about the place in which we eat and sleep and sometimes even find some kind of rest and even more about the internet. As quarantine and lockdown periods forced so many of us to stay indoors and in one place as much as possible — and for many others, we also know that this was impossible — it became that much more urgent to be online, but, as Nosipho and other sex worker activists pointed out, not that much easier. Similarly indicting systems of inaccessibility, Makgosi remembers highlights how the pandemic compounded the ableist violence that has always rendered disabled people disposable.

Of course, our precarious use of the internet reaches far beyond our financial and professional commitments, even before this particular pandemic. For so many of us, the ability to create a life, or lives, online, where the parameters of our existence seem more flexible and malleable, has been a dope experience. Many of the things we were prohibited from doing when we were younger, and the resources to which we had no access, have become more possible, more reachable. But this visibility also means that we are more vulnerable to the cultures of violence that have long shaped our lives. Aisha, who has been online since some of the earliest days of social media in Kenya, remembered watching how misogyny changed the freedom with which many women related with each other; here, she reflects on how this volatile online environment shaped her relationship with her body, on and off screen. Mamello and Nosipho, who work to change the terms of how we think about kink and pleasure, considers the violent connections between pleasure, femicide and re/productive economies under capitalism through a photo essay, while Makgosi shares how her experiences of experimenting with the sex toys she reviews online. And Nyambura, an archivist who loves lists, compiled a caring and useful how-to for people in Kenya who need mental health support.

Another thing we talked about, prompted by the Tweetchat we hosted for the first zine, was our shared curiosity and uncertainty on how to share what we know about sex and gender with the children in the scope of our care, and how to listen to what we do not. We recalled our own childhood curiosities, vulnerabilities and wishes for our younger selves. In this edition, Mamello writes some pointers for her younger self, and Ann shares experiences with working with children who have varying levels of access to the internet.

With the support of the kind, fierce, welcoming feminist aunties at APC-WRP and in community with feminists from different parts of the world, different generations and different perspectives, here is just one of the afterlives of the Making a Feminist Internet: Africa convening. Read, circulate, and maybe even make a few of these yourself, too 😘

— No Sweetness Here Collective

Feminist Ecologies of the Internet: A Provocation

By Ruth Nyambura

What would it mean for feminists to consider the ecological costs of the infrastructure that makes the internet possible? What would it mean to truly expand our visions of a 'feminist internet' by meaningfully engaging the lived realities of the communities where this infrastructure that builds the internet we seek to democratize is extracted from? How can feminists working on the intersections of ICTs and ecology constructively dialogue and build a cross-movement alliance that organizes for a feminist internet, critically centring questions of capitalism, colonialism and its afterlives of extraction, environmental racism, classism and ecocide?

This is a dialogue that is urgently needed if we as a global feminist community are to claim or declare a 'feminist internet.

These conversations also have to go beyond the usual solidarity statements and petitions support for mining affected communities, mainly based in the Global South. A good and necessarily difficult place to start is to interrogate why it is so easy to envision an internet that is feminist while so much silence abounds around extractivism and its value chains, as well as the human and ecological costs that make the internet possible. What do these silos of liberation politics say about the state of our imagination for transnational, collective feminist organizing for liberation?

Whose feminist internet anyway?

Paying attention to and making a radical commitment to an anti-capitalist politics of ecology is also an extension of the class, gendered and race questions we have learned and are learning to ask. For example, what happens to how we do feminism when we interrogate who exactly gets to access the internet and which structures privilege or hinder this access? Majority of the mining operations across the world are in the Global South, in rural communities, on Indigenous territories.

These are communities that continue to experience the violence of dispossession and myriad other forms of violations and harms that

"A dialogue, an urgent need for cross-movement organizing and solidarity! A provocation!"

stretch back to the colonial era. These communities also experience serious challenges in accessing the internet despite the fact that their lands, bodies and territories are often stripped bare in order to produce the minerals that make the internet possible.

In the last four decades of neoliberal globalization we have witnessed a general retreat from a deep internationalist and anti-imperialist politics - which would have addressed the flows of extraction and builds resistance and true alternatives - to a vague internationalist humanism- which largely operates in the realm of pitying those dispossessed by extractivism. At best, this exploitative politics promotes fair trade kinds of certifications schemes; at worst, it asks for a 'kinder' capitalism. In short, this speaks to the NGO-ization of radical movement building and organizing and the erasure and suppression of demands that go beyond singular policy changes with the goal being the dismantling of systems like capitalism.

So, who gets to claim a feminist internet and who doesn't? A dialogue, an urgent need for cross-movement organizing and solidarity! A provocation!

What Makes a Feminist Internet? Some case studies

Compiled by Ruth Nyambura

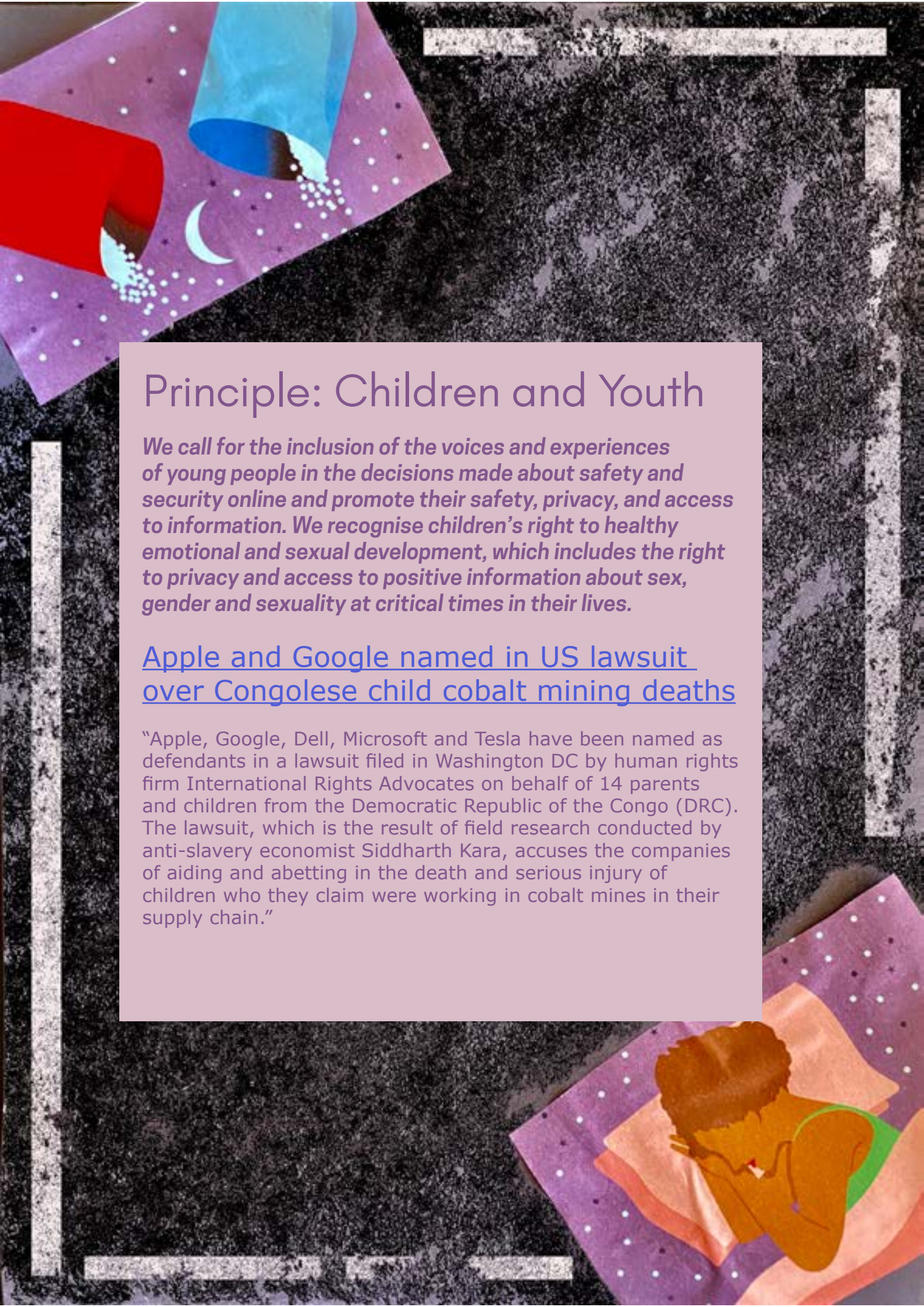
The Feminist Principles of the Internet

Principle: Alternative Economies

We are committed to interrogating the capitalist logic that drives technology towards further privatisation, profit and corporate control. We work to create alternative forms of economic power that are grounded in principles of cooperation, solidarity, commons, environmental sustainability, and openness.

The hidden costs of cobalt mining

"Many of them work by hand. That's why they are known as creuseurs — French for diggers. They don't use power tools. They don't wear face masks and often no gloves. They do it because they live in one of the poorest countries in the world, and cobalt is valuable. The mineral is essential for the lithium-ion batteries found in smartphones and many electric vehicles. Most of the world's cobalt supply comes from the Congo region. These cobalt-laden chunks of rock leave the country destined for refineries in Europe and China, where they enter the complex supply chains of some of the largest technology and automotive firms."



Principle: Children and Youth

We call for the inclusion of the voices and experiences of young people in the decisions made about safety and security online and promote their safety, privacy, and access to information. We recognise children's right to healthy emotional and sexual development, which includes the right to privacy and access to positive information about sex, gender and sexuality at critical times in their lives.

Apple and Google named in US lawsuit over Congolese child cobalt mining deaths

"Apple, Google, Dell, Microsoft and Tesla have been named as defendants in a lawsuit filed in Washington DC by human rights firm International Rights Advocates on behalf of 14 parents and children from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The lawsuit, which is the result of field research conducted by anti-slavery economist Siddharth Kara, accuses the companies of aiding and abetting in the death and serious injury of children who they claim were working in cobalt mines in their supply chain."

Principle: Resistance

The internet is a space where social norms are negotiated, performed and imposed, often in an extension of other spaces shaped by patriarchy and heteronormativity. Our struggle for a feminist internet is one that forms part of a continuum of our resistance in other spaces, public, private and in-between.

Tossed aside in the 'White Gold' rush: Indigenous people are left poor as tech world takes lithium from under their feet

"But opposition is not hard to find. A protest banner, reading "The lithium belongs to the local people," recently welcomed travelers outside the airport in Salta, which is frequented by mining executives. The drive to the salt flats leads past a barrier on a steep mountain pass with the spray-painted message: "No to the contamination of the mines." And settlements are dotted with people concerned about the future.

"They are taking everything away from us," said Carlos Guzman, 44, an indigenous resident who leads a group worried about contamination and water use by the lithium mines. "These lands are ancestral. We live by this. By the fields. By our cattle. This way of life is in danger."

"We don't eat batteries," the hand-painted sign read. "They take the water, life is gone."

Sex Workers Speak: all about the internet

By Nosipho Vidima

In South Africa, sex work and related activities are criminalised in national legislation, and sex workers are also harassed through various "public nuisance" municipal by-laws. These laws create oppressive conditions for sex workers, whose human rights are also frequently negated. They experience discrimination and marginalisation which often manifests as violence and abuse.
Using the internet and social media platforms is becoming daily rituals - as a way to connect with family, friends and the world. It's also on these platforms that most people are promoting their businesses. But for most South African sex workers this has not happened yet. Four sex workers and sex work(er) activists have a conversation around this gap or slow uptake on the use of online platforms for sex work. SexyC (35), Fate (28), Mickey (27) and I work in the sex work activist space/ organisations, which makes our voices not just our voices but also representing the voices of sex workers we meet on a daily basis through creative spaces, outreach, advocacy work and human rights defense interventions.

NV: I know you are part of creative spaces with street-based sex workers, you work with the Legal Defense Centre team, you do outreach. When you talk to sex workers about online sex work what are their views? Why do you think that sex workers in South Africa don't use these platforms?

M: All they know is physical sex, physical interaction with a client and then call it sex work. So, they're not informed about doing it online, they're not informed about these platforms. That's why some are not doing it. Some are afraid of showing their faces but also some don't know about these platforms
F: Yes, they know about online sex work, but the response is that they don't have time for online sex work. They too busy for online sex work.
F: They tell me "I do not have time to go on my phone" and all those things. They tell me they just want to go to the street, and they do not feel like online will work. Some people do both.
S: They're afraid of being online because they are not exposed to using computers and I tried to explain to them that using a computer is the same as using your phone. They also say that they do not have typing skills. The others fear and feel like there's competition online. And others were saying that everyone online is sexy and that only the hot girls are the ones who go online. They feel like the online platform is not the one where business moves.
M: Some of them are not informed about them e.g. OnlyFans people think it's only for slay queens they don't understand that this platform is part of sex work.

NV: Do you think the option for online sex work in South Africa is available to most sex workers on the ground? And I am referring to rural sex workers -- when you think about the groups that you met recently in Parow, Winelands, Paarl, George, Queenstown...

F: Most people don't have data for such things.
M: Some people don't have the equipment or smartphones even, plus data is expensive for all of this and you also need photographers and such.
S: Also the fear of meeting up with an online client that you've never seen and you've never met before. What are you expecting? Maybe that person is a rapist, a murderer or a killer. You'd never know whether you're communicating with a monster online.

NV: It was Covid-19 times and sex workers were not making any money. Did you happen to have a conversation with sex workers around about the online sex work? E.g. selling your panties etc.

S: I explained to them that in fact business online is viable. I continued to tell them that they have beautiful breasts and that they have lovely hips and a lovely purse. Someone could be attracted to your breasts, some may be attracted to your feet. Response was that on the street when a car stops you can speak for yourself whereas online you can't speak up. So, that's the challenge.
M: They are scared of the unknown. I was a sex worker in Claremont; I'm scared of going to CBD because of competition. Some are afraid of getting out of their comfort zone.
M: Those of us who do know about these platforms we need to make sure that we tell them about these platforms and not withhold information. Yeah that's what I think. Cause I'm sure that there are people who would do it especially during the time of Covid-19 they could have made money on OnlyFans etc. easily but they didn't know.
F: Most of them live with their family members. They used phones with no internet connection because they liked the fact that people call each other. The phone with internet connection would be the one that they use for their family. There were a few people who had spares. They also had help from Ally D who introduced the online platforms [to them]. Some of them did it and some did not. Out of 30 odd sex workers I met, only two used online platforms.

NV: Based on your knowledge and interactions why do sex workers have two phones?

F: One phone is for work and the other is for my personal life. It also helps with protecting our identities if you don't want to know that you're a sex worker and you don't want your family to know you're doing sex work. You know that this work phone is for work and when you put it on silent then it won't disturb you and you have your you-time.

NV: We should be doing a workshop on online sex work?

F: Yes, because it is safe. In street-based [sex work] people are not united and are on their own. There is no solidarity on the street; sex workers are scattered whereas online when we can circulate that person's picture or their numbers to fellow sex workers and we advise each other.

There should be a workshop that promotes online sex work and how it works. July* is also doing online sex work outreach; July* can also advise sex workers on online sex work. I could also come through and speak to them and I could also speak to them about the risks etc.
NV: On an online platform there's the option of reporting the client whereas on the street there isn't much regulation.

NV: I know we started on the street or at brothels -- what made you move from that to online sex work platforms?

M: There's more money online than there is on the street and it's also safer than the street because you'll find that clients can be dangerous or harmful. For example, some of them will pick you up then throw you away somewhere in a dump. It's very dangerous in the street than online. There's a lot of competition on the street and that causes fights and bickering because of clients. That's the reason why I left street sex work. The main reason I left is safety, there's no safety on the street.
F: It's safer for me, because on the street it feels risky, example when you meet a random person you don't know, I prefer meeting someone online and then chatting and then meeting.
S: There is more money online and it's safer for me and the privacy because the client comes to you, not you standing on the street to get a client. It's more private, more confidential because even the sites used clients need to fill in forms and subscribe.

NV: Have you ever been afraid of doing online sex work?
M: I was afraid because maybe my picture will be circulated and maybe my brother or my family might see it but as time went by, I was like I'm doing this work.

NV: What are these formal sex work platforms and why do we choose them opposed to Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, OnlyFans, WhatsApp?

F: Red Velvet, Sex Trader, Glamour girls, cloud nine and NSA.
F: Because they exist and people were recommending them and some of them have benefits. For example, on Red Velvet they send you a professional photographer and on NSA you post any random picture; there are no safety precautions.
M: Theses spaces do not show that you're a sex worker to your family; they are discreet. Most of the time clients know what they are on these sites for versus social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, in comparison to platforms such as Sex Trader and Red Velvet.

NV: American twitter sex workers are there; they use the platform to advertise their services. Why is it that here in South Africa we don't use this platform? What is your reason for not using Facebook, Twitter and Instagram in the same way you use ADS Africa and Red Velvet?

F: I don't have a reason; I'm still learning new things so I am still going to Instagram because I am friends with someone who's using Instagram and OnlyFans, so I am also thinking of doing those things. I need to be on my A-game to do those and I will get there.
M: I do have Twitter, but I've never actually used it for sex work because I always thought

that they would speak at home because sex work is still stigmatised. I think that is one of the reasons why I haven't used Twitter. On Twitter I have two clients.
M: I can create a fake account and post pictures obviously I'll post my services. I've seen people do that. I've seen it. Like OnlyFans. Okay, so I would google a picture of someone with a big booty or pictures or BBW, which show that this person has big boobs and a big ass and then upload those pictures and my contact numbers.
F: I don't really have Twitter but I do use a fake Facebook account, and I join groups that enable us to promote our sex work ads. Those groups don't have a lot of money like the formal sex work platforms.
S: No I don't use these platforms besides for posting around sex work advocacy and issues pertaining to the decriminalisation of sex work.

NV: So is it easier to post advocacy work and things pertaining to the decriminalisation of sex work rather than posting your own ads online? If so, why is that the case?

M: It used to be hard for me to post anything until I did an interview on TV and then my family found out about what I do for a living;they did not immediately accept but because I said I was working for an organisation that assists sex workers they finally did.
F: Now, I do post because my family knows that I advocate for sex workers even on my WhatsApp, I post pictures in lingerie and stuff.
M: Facebook for now. I am freer to speak about it because back then it was a huge challenge for me for them to accept what is going on. They are not educated on what sex work was, so now I am more empowered to answer them and to speak freely about sex work because I know what it is that I want.
S: I do post on decriminalisation and such issues. It's easier, but I would never post an ad, no.
M: But I have courage now. Even on WhatsApp I do promote sex work and I find it easier on WhatsApp because its close family members and they ask me questions, then I answer them. It's part of sensitisation mos, hahaha.

NV: Has anyone ever swore at you for speaking about sex work on the internet?

M: Yes, there's this word that they called me, I don't remember. They swore at me and there's this word that they used that I had to google. This word was used to describe a sex worker. Also they said that I am promoting the idea of sex work to underage people and then I had to explain to them that no, that's not the case, we only promote sex work for people who are 18-years-old and older. Saying that we are encouraging children to do sex work is a big issue because that's not what we do.

NV: Besides us, organisations and sex worker allies, do you know any sex workers who are in the movement who post about sex work?

M: There's a transgender [sex worker] from Margate [who] posts. There's Vuki, she posts. Who else? There aren't many though; there are less than 10.

NV: Do you think they are afraid?

M: Yes, I think they are afraid because sex work is stigmatised in South Africa, because you'll post and then your family members will swear at you for the work you do and your friends insult you because of sex work. And sometimes at home they don't know that we are doing sex work and so being exposed like that is hard. Sometimes we even buy uniforms to make our family members think that we are not doing sex work. So I think that that's the reason why most people don't disclose that they do sex work because they insult you, they insult your family and they insult your children. My children will be traumatised because of the work that I do.

NV: F...You have disclosed the work you do to your family but still you won't advertise on social media platforms?

F: Yes, there is a difference between them knowing and them seeing it.

NV: If we woke up tomorrow and sex work was decriminalised and there was no stigma do you think that more sex workers would move to doing online sex work? Or use the online platform to do their sex work? If sex work was decriminalised you would be posting on Facebook, you would be posting on Twitter? You would be posting on Instagram?

F: I don't know, I think it depends on the person, because even me it took time for me to do that. Cause I was also street-based and house-based. Depends on the person and how they feel.
S: I am one of the sex workers who doesn't give a damn anymore, I've been through a lot on my own, no family member has come to me and said I can help you. None of them have ever asked me whether I have eaten, the only time family members make contact with me is when they want something, so I've learnt to live my life alone. Which is why I say that when an opportunity arises I wouldn't hesitate.
S: Yes I would, I was watching Big Brother Naija the other day, the whole world is watching them, they are exposed. They wear panties in front of cameras, they are naked in front of cameras, they shake, they twerk. What they should be doing in private they are doing in front of cameras and they don't see that as something wrong. They don't see that as sex work. My question then would have to be what makes sex work different? If I would post a picture of myself in my lingerie or a naked picture it becomes a problem. What makes that different from Big Brother Nigeria? They make headlines so what makes some sex work decriminalised and some forms of sex work not? The answer is I do not give a damn.
F: Yes, it has a lot to do with family but it also depends on the person when there's no stigma and it's decriminalised and I willing to show my family that I am doing sex work. Even when it is decriminalised the chances of family accepting it are very slim. Even when it is decriminalised I would still have to have a conversation with my family about sex work.
S: It also depends on the amount of courage that you have as an individual; they can do everything online to protect you but it depends on your courage as a person for example posting your picture on Instagram is not safe.
M: I can also but my phone doesn't take high quality pictures. It's a low quality camera and I won't be able to show my face. I cannot just use any pictures I need to ensure that it's the best quality, make sure it's nice and the

lingerie is on point. I hear you babes; I can also use my pictures. It's fine as long as I don't show my face.
M: I think once sex work is regarded as a profession like any other job that's where I'll be able to speak out and say that I am a sex worker.

NV: M...you seem to have done a lot of research into these platforms and online sex work, please share? You going to be on these platforms, some of them you've already started, you've open accounts etc. You've assessed the danger, you know the platforms you would use and those you feel safe using. You also know which ones need you to be cautious.

M: Yes, I have a Pornhub account? When I had a camera, I used the stream webcam service on Pornhub in my free time.

NV: Did they pay you?

M: No, they did not. I deactivated my account. They were supposed to use PayPal and then I deleted the video.

NV: Are you planning on doing more videos on Pornhub?

M: Yes

NV: Why aren't you afraid of Pornhub?

M: I am not afraid, I don't know why but even Facebook I am not afraid to even stream it. So as soon as I get my iPhone I will be able to do all of the things that I want.

NV: Okay, so that's the only thing that's got you stuck is that you don't have the proper equipment. Your OnlyFans account is you posting videos?

M: No not yet, I'm waiting for October for when I get my phone.

NV: Now for the closing let's give our readers an idea of whomst we are, What kind of area did you grow up in? Was it a suburb, township?

S: Township.
F: Cape Town
NV: Township and Suburbs
M: Rural Area

NV: Were you exposed to laptops and computers at school or after school?

S: After school. When I grew up, I never had a cellphone all my life until I was grown. Parents could not afford cell phones for all their children. We were 8 children.
M: [Going] Home from school was 10km. It was a rural school, I had none of those things.

NV: Your education level?

S: Post-matric qualification of business management.
F: Matric
M: Matric but I'm studying part time "so that I can say that I am a sex worker with a PHD"
NV: Matric. Still trying to get a higher education.

BODY PARTS
by Aisha Ali Hajji
GIVE ME A
break

I don't know when I first noticed it exactly, but I remember that I was looking through my phone's image gallery for a photo, when I came across rows and rows of selfies -- almost the same picture, taken several times with small alterations. The poses changed slightly in each of them; the head turned in different angles, some with smiles, some without and shifting to find the best light. At first I didn't pay much attention, and then one day I counted them. I was taken aback that I had taken almost 20 selfies, in what I remembered was 10 or 15 mins. Out of them, one had made the cut – probably posted on Instagram or Twitter.

I was thinking the other day about how lucky we are to live in an era in which women are able to take their pictures and post them online, choosing when and what to show about ourselves. It's amazing that we are at a time when women have gained a lot of agency over their bodies, including the right to display or withhold as much as they choose to. But whenever I think of this, I think also of the retaliation that women face online for doing this, including the ways in which we are consumed. More often than not, whenever women post pictures online, they are faced with reactions that accumulate into a violent policing of women's bodies. This is intensified when someone is dark skinned, fat or presenting in a way which doesn't conform to gender stereotypes.

Because of this, over the years, we have learned either through personal experience, or through watching other people on the receiving end, that gaining agency over how and when to display our bodies does not necessarily mean that we will be protected from the violence of patriarchy and transphobia that is used to dissect and dictate which type of bodies are allowed to exist online. Because of this gatekeeping many of us have learned to censor what we share online, cutting out the parts that we feel will elicit the most violence.

Some years back on Kenyan twitter, we used to have #TittyTuesday, where women would post pictures of their boobs every Tuesday. A few weeks into it, something that had been started by women who engaged with each other was hijacked by the male gaze, and before long women who posted their pictures were subjected to abuse and bullying. Eventually, we completely stopped posting pictures because the violence was too sustained, too heavy. In the same way, over the years, this has slowly shaped the way in which we post our pictures, and which parts of our bodies we choose to post.

I think about how this has created for us a version of our bodies that is only real on social media, like the 20th selfie I post when I feel like it meets whatever standards I've set for postable selfies. On social media, my face is smoother than it is, perfectly aligned and arranged in a way in which my best features – my mouth and eyes – are most noticeable. I rarely smile, because when I smile, my round cheeks bulge even more, burying my eyes in them which gives my face something to be criticised about. When I post photos that show more, my chest will look firm and upright, and I ensure that the bulge of the rolls of my stomach aren't too visible. For my most provocative photos, I wear short dresses or shorts showing off my legs. Because I am light skinned, I can post these pictures

knowing that the risk of violence has been buffered by this particular proximity to desirability, that when the trolls show up, my complexion will not be under scrutiny. I am aware that for many, they have to perform more or different surgeries on their bodies before they are considered suitable to become Social Media Bodies.

I take a lot of pictures of my body, different parts, different angles, different poses. When I'm alone, I take pictures of my stomach rolls, my thighs, my breasts, which haven't been upright in a couple of years. I don't post most of these images online because they remain as photos discarded on the floor of my gallery, like pieces of material that you imagine are scattered in a collage artist's studio.

The way in which bodies are viewed and discussed and consumed online is a form of violence which has created a disconnect between how I see my body and how it actually is. It's like I have parallel existence; the one that my body exists in, as a tangible, breathing, moving thing. As a vessel that gives me shelter, holds my bones and skin so that I can function, a home that contains my heart, love, pain, fear, joy and laughter. And my other body which is made of the parts that I cut off and shape through 20 takes until it's perfect to offer the world because they meet its expectation.

Sacrilege: Anxieties and disposable bodies

In South Africa, every three hours gender diverse people and women are killed. Most of the time it is at the hands of men. These men are our uncles; cousins: our friends; teachers: colleagues: neighbours; strangers; police; the people tasked with protecting us by way of upholding the rule of law; our lovers; and our fathers too. In South Africa those of us who are made disposable by fragile masculinities live in fear; we're reminded by men, the constant social media posts and news reports "woman went missing"... "woman killed"... "woman found dead"... In South Africa, those of us who are deemed disposable are always on guard... always watching our drinks... always asking ourselves "can I go out wearing this?" ... "does that count as rape?"... "who will believe me?"... "was it my fault?" ... "am I next?" In South Africa, it's not a choice it's a way of life.

tell the darkness
I won't die...

Autonomy: Pleasure is my birthright

I enjoy having sex. I enjoy having sex a lot. I've found pleasure in deciding and defining it for myself. On my own terms. In my own time. I haven't always known or felt like I could ask for what I like. I haven't always felt comfortable pleasuring and playing with myself. I haven't always been asked "what do you like? What are your fantasies? What do you want me to do to you? Where can I touch you? How should I hold you? What does aftercare look like for you? I haven't always known that pleasure is my birthright. Or understood that lusting for it is an extension of my desire and right to freedom. I haven't always known that pleasure is my birthright.

Capitalism: These bodies of ours, who owns them?

Who profits from our bodies? Our sexualities and pleasures too? When do they stop moving on capitalist conveyor belts? In noticeable and unnoticeable ways. How much control do we really have? Think of social media. The bulk of affordable and accessible body products, cosmetics and hair products. The things that we use to shape our aesthetic, brand ourselves for success, set ourselves apart and decide how we want to show up. The toys that we buy to enjoy, claim and reclaim our pleasures and bodily autonomy. Who owns these means of production? So, who profits from our bodies? Our sexualities and pleasures too? Is it us? Is it really us?

Words by: Mamello Sejake and Nosipho Vidima
Images by: Xhanti Mkonto

The Hidden Truth About Virginity

By Ann Holland

My mother had this book titled *The Hidden Truth about Virginity*. She bought it when I was 13, and there was this unspoken rule about how I was not allowed to read it, but I read it anyway. I was a very late bloomer; sexually that is. I wasn't interested in having sex and there was nothing about it I found appealing. But I was very curious, and which is why my mother's purchase really excited me. I would sneak into her room on Friday afternoons after school and read that book religiously. It includes a story about a mother who hires a woman to teach her daughter about the benefits of keeping her virginity until marriage. This book was the first official sex talk I had ever received.

Growing up, my home wasn't one of those progressive families where we openly talked about sex or recieved proper sex education. No – it was one of those homes where you got an African version of sex talk which included three things:

- Don't ever get pregnant otherwise you will be homeless.
- Dress well, avoid men and try not to get raped.
- Be a virgin until you are married. That means no boyfriends until you are done with university.

This version of "The Sex Talk" didn't happen once. I heard it every time someone got pregnant, if a boy spoke to me or when someone got raped. They were very uncomfortable conversations that I hated having, especially because I had no intentions of having sex. I never got to finish the book but what I read sold me; the writer chatted about how keeping your virginity till marriage made you enjoy 90% of marriage and you only experienced 10% problems.

This was the opposite of girls who had not kept their virginity. I might not have cared for sex at thirteen but I cared about being the perfect wife and having the perfect marriage. So I was going to wait for marriage.

The first time I had sex, I hated it. Everything about the moment was wrong, reckless and stupid. I have never been married so you can imagine my vow and dream to enjoy 90% of marriage ended somewhere. I was 17, had just completed high school and I was dating someone that I was certain was the love of my life. I made it very clear to him that I would not be having sex until I said "I Do" and he agreed. He was supportive and sweet. He was my first boyfriend and my first kiss, and after four months of dating, we were certain we would get married.

My journey into the world of sex began after high school. A friend who had gladly preached the gospel of chastity found within *The Hidden Truth of Virginity* with me had started having sex. Her boyfriend had explained to her how important it was that they have sex because if they didn't, it would lead him to cheat. Her fear of losing him and driving him away had let her break her vow. My own fear and need to keep my boyfriend faithful pushed me to tell him I was ready. I wasn't.

I made decisions about my body based on factors that had nothing to do with me. I chose not to have sex not because I wasn't ready but because of the value placed on "virginity". Like many girls around the world, I was taught that my value is based on how pure men found me. I started having sex because society teaches that our partners infidelity is inevitably a woman's fault. That we must do everything, humanly and inhumanly possible to keep men with us. The pressure to please a patriarchal society taught me that my body was not my own. I wish that hadn't been the case. I wish that I had someone older sit me down and give me a talk on sexual education on the basis of sexual liberation.

I would have liked to hear that my body was my own, that I controlled who touched it and who wouldn't. That sex can be something beautiful or fun and safe. I should have learnt about different contraceptives, not just condoms. About how the morning after pill works and how the pill isn't best for me because I can't deal with hormonal imbalances. About how the copper

IUD is great for me but the amount of pain I would experience from its insertion for months would be too much until I was in my mid-20s and older enough to withstand the pain.

Someone should have taught me about pleasure, and how it's not right that my partner was never invested in it – somebody should have taught him, too. I needed to be taught about masturbation, self pleasure and how there is nothing sinful about me making my body happy with my own hands. I would have liked to know about safe abortions, places I could learn about pregnancy and responsibility. I would have preferred it if my first time had been great. I needed to have an arsenal of information on sex so that I could have made the best informed decision for me. I realised that if I couldn't have that, then I would do it for others.

When I was 23, I started a program with my friend, called the Sistah Sistah Foundation. The goal was very simple: to start a mentorship program for girls aged 9-19. We would pair them with older women who acted as a big sister and helped them navigate school and life. In three years our vision grew and transformed. We started working with both boys and girls. We hosted literature classes, free tutoring, feminism and rape culture classes and worked towards ending period poverty by donating menstrual products to people who needed them.

We helped formulate a method that focuses on teaching children about sex education, something parents and guardians can use at school and home even when it's awkward.

The Awkward Sex Talk

By Ann Holland

"What is a blow job?"

I was asked this question by a 16-year-old girl during an Indaba session. In Chewa, an Indaba is the word for "meeting", and during an Indaba we discuss sex, rape culture, Feminism and other social topics. You could tell the question excited her and her friends; while some knew what it was and had already done it, the rest had no idea what a blowjob entailed and were dying to find out.

Now, you may think this is a silly question, if you have good access to the internet in your part of the world, and have come to expect technological savvy from the children and young people in your life for whom Google is a click or swipe away. But my classes often involve children who come from the poorest parts of Zambia, and have no phone or access to smartphones. Some might not even know how to access Google.

As someone who teaches different age groups about sex through in-person classes, my podcast and other platforms, teaching children about sex is a completely different ballgame. I usually tell parents and guardians who are interested in teaching their children about sex that it can be an interesting learning curve or the most awkward experience of your life.

Take, for example, the first time I ever gave 'the sex talk.' It was to my sister -- she is six years younger than me, but our relationship is very much like mother and daughter. My mother and I often joke about how we co-parent my young sister. So, you can imagine how the first sex talk we ever had was extremely uncomfortable for me. I didn't want my sister/baby having sex at all. I would have gladly preferred it if she died a nun but I knew she would eventually have sex and I wanted her to have all the information she needed. When she was fifteen I told her I would like us to talk and she was nervous. She thought she had done something wrong because of how serious I sounded.

When the time came I sweated a lot and had this sick feeling in my stomach.I prayed that it would end immediately. When I was done, I quietly walked out of the room and avoided her for hours. When it was over, I thought she was relieved, too, that it was over, but two days later, she came over and asked if I could advise her friend who had been having unprotected sex. She had assured her friend that her older sister was not judgmental and completely cool.
By the end of that year, I had given over thirty sex education talks to my sister's friends, and I had become the group's big sister. I advised them on contraceptives, sex, relationships and gave them a free space to vent and not feel judged. Most of them were not even having sex yet, but they were just curious and confused. They had questions that Google couldn't answer. They wanted an older person to validate them, to tell them it was perfectly normal to have sexual feelings and that they weren't weird.

I didn't see the need to give formal and organised sex education classes until I volunteered at acommunity group that worked with girls. The facilitator played this game called "Open Circle", where each girl was given a paper she had to drop in a box. Each girl first had to share something about herself before releasing the paper. There were

about 20 girls, aged 11 to 19. The first round started simply – people shared their favourite colour and foods. In the second round, we started to hear more about kisses and sex and it blew up from there.

For 30 minutes, these girls opened up about their boyfriends, their sex lives and everything they had done. You could see their excitement -- they wanted to talk about sex, and they especially loved not being judged. I thought things were going well and that the facilitators would talk about contraceptives, consent and ensure that the girls had adequate information. But what I saw next was one of the most disappointing moments I have experienced.

Instead of openly talking to and educating those girls, the facilitators decided to preach about the evils of fornication and how Jesus did not approve of their sins. I saw disappointment and betrayal on those girls' faces. Instead of being taught, they were being judged. It didn't help that one of the girls who was fifteen and hadn't been in a classroom in years was heavily pregnant. I kept thinking about how, if someone had talked to her and truly given her the right form of sex education and opportunities, she might not be pregnant, or she would have the support she needed during her pregnancy. I wanted different for her and for girls like her so I went ahead and invested my time, money and energy in learning how to teach children about sex.

Kids are very special and how you talk to them influences their lives significantly. If you make them feel small they start to see themselves that way. If you treat them with kindness, patience and understanding, they grow up to be people who feel deserving of kindness, affection and patience. How you treat sex in your homes and communities affects your children. If you treat sex like a taboo, you are leaving your children vulnerable to experiencing and/or commiting a whole lot of danger. They could get sexually assaulted and not speak about it because it's a no-go topic. They could be having unprotected sex, performing abortions with wires and inserting harmful products in their reproductive system in order to be tight, taste sweet or seem cool. You have a choice as a guardian to either pretend that sex doesn't exist and risk endangering your child, or invest in a sex education model that

leaves them feeling empowered, smart and safe.

Every child is different , and you can not use the same teaching method on all kids. I have gotten into a class and I could tell from their level of education, social status and financial position which words would work best and which tone would be better to use. There isn't one style to teach children about sex as there are so many ways and most of these styles differ with age.

By Ann Holland

Your children are their own people, with their own emotions and feelings, and sex may one day be part of their lives no matter how much you wish it wasn't. Your job is to help guide them and equip them with the best knowledge possible. You want a happy and informed child – not an unhappy, secretive and uninformed child. You need to put in the work to create a relationship where your child feels safe and not judged.

The sex talk doesn't have to be a one-time thing. It could be something that evolves into an open door, where you and your child offer information and safety. To do this, you have to be open-minded, do a lot of research and allow your child's curiosity to be fed. It will only be awkward if you make it awkward.

1. LEARN YOUR AUDIENCE

Some children know more things than adults do and some children have different sexualities, genders, abilities and other factors. You need to do research on what works for the children you are speaking to. You can Google, watch videos or simply do a little TikTok searching on what different kids think about sex, but you alsohave to observe your children in their own environments and understand what works for them so that you can help them.

2. CONSENT

From my experience and research, female-bodied children are often taught how not to get raped while male-bodied children are only ever taught about condoms. You need to teach children about consent – how "no" means no, "maybe" means no, a coerced "yes" means no and that only an enthusiastic "yes" means yes. You need to teach them to not rape nor force themselves on anyone, and who to speak, or report to if they experience any sexual violation Out of everything you will teach them in life, this is the most important thing.

3. BODY AUTONOMY

It's very important to teach children that their bodies are their own and that they belong to no one else -- not to God, not to their parents nor to their future partners. This teaches them that no one has the right to violate them or take advantage of them, and that whatever happens to their body has to be their decision. This shows your children that you respect them as human beings and if their guardians and teachers can teach them this, they will grow up to be independent, responsible adults who exercise healthy control over their own lives.

4. PEDOPHILIA

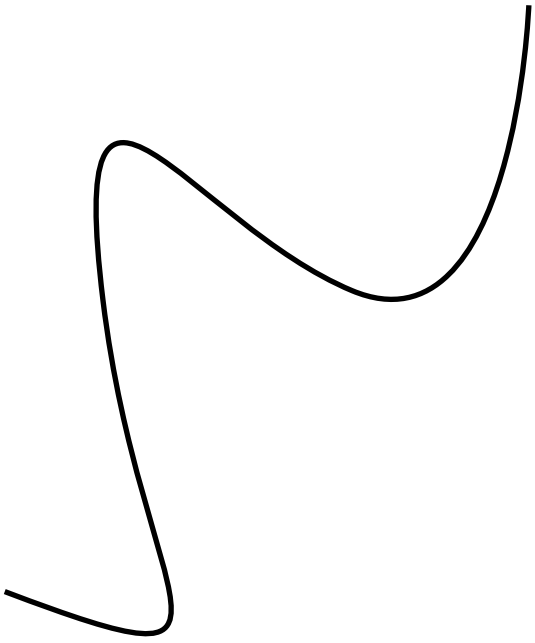
In my experience, before children are 10 years old, many would have already had a pedophilic experience. It could be with a teacher, relative or neighbour. It's extremely important you teach your children about the difference between an age appropriate partner and a pedophile. You might think by not telling them you are protecting their innocence, but you are only protecting yourself. There is violence and good in the world and it's your duty as a guardian to help children understand and report danger and also add on to the good. When you teach children that it's not normal and not right for adults to prey on children you equip them with knowledge and power.

5. SEX

One thing a lot of people who teach children about sex will tell you is that most kids aren't even interested in having sex. They will be someday – but for now they just want to learn about it. If you, as the person that's meant to take care of them, doesn't teach them, they might end up being taught by someone who could take advantage of them. You could make this process as clinical as possible but you will just end up cringing throughout this session. I like to take myself back to when I was younger; if I am teaching 14-year-olds, I channel my inner 14-year-old self and speak to me. How would I have liked to learn about sex as a child? What was the least awkward and comfortable way I would have liked to learn? Then I work from them. How much detail you give about sex depends on their age and how much they are willing to talk. Your job is to give them the basics.

6. CONTRACEPTIVES

UNESCO & The Swedish Embassy launched a program called Let's Talk that teaches teenagers about sex and contraceptives. Kabulonga Girls school was the first school to undergo the program and they noticed a huge drop in the number of girls who dropped out of school due to pregnancy. Girls who knew their contraceptive options had very little chances of getting pregnant. Your children will have sex whether you like it or not. You could help them know their contraceptive options or you could watch them become teenage parents or worse suffer complications from STIs or unsafe abortion complications. It is imperative that you teach your children about all their possible options, regardless of how religious or conservative you are. Teach your female-bodied children to buy their own condoms, tell your male -bodied children about all forms of contraceptives. Take them to clinics that could advise them on the best possible form of contraceptives they could use.



7. INTERNAL WORK

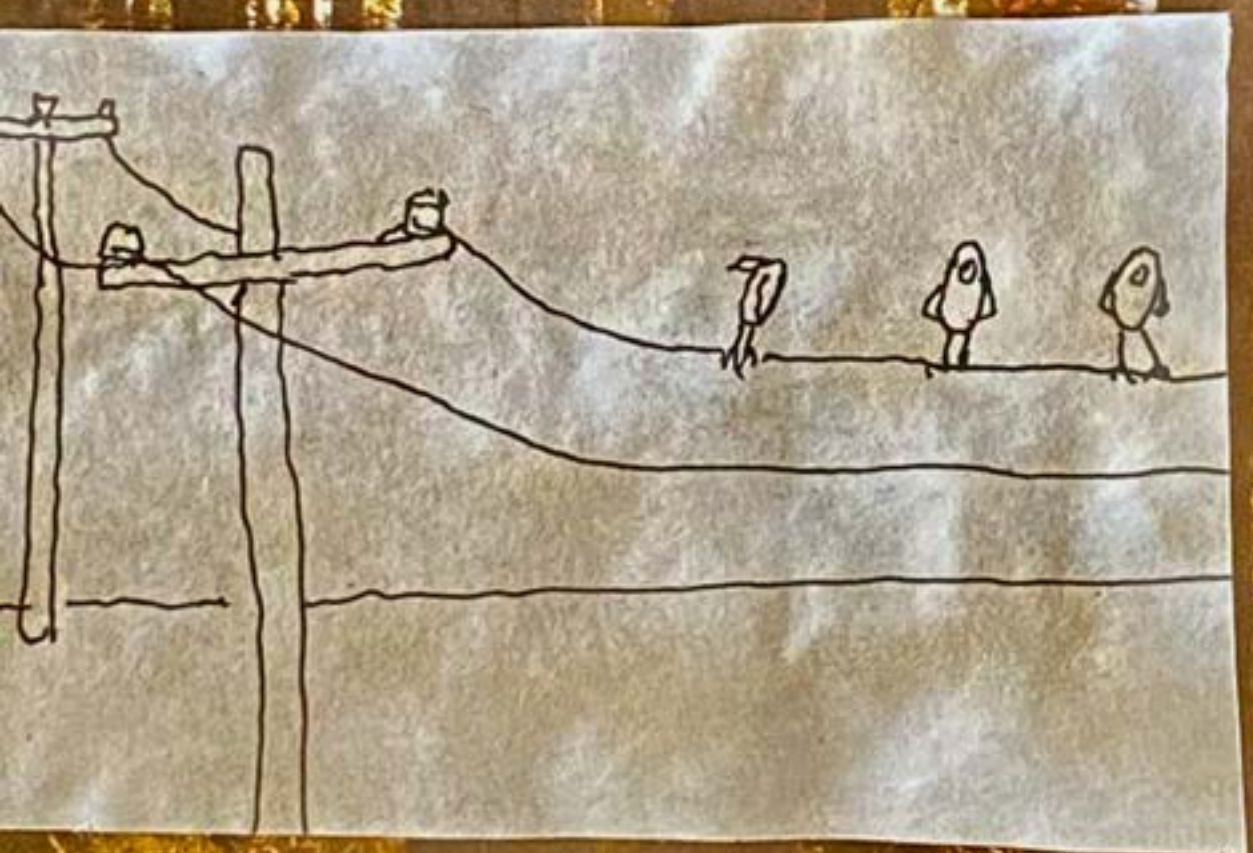
Take a pause before you teach your children anything. You have to write down all the things you wish you knew about sex before you started having sex. Have a very honest conversation with yourself. What would you have liked to know? What do you regret the most? What was it that you needed the most? Once you figure it out, you will then be in the best place to teach your children.

prelude: what is freedom to me?

by Makgosi Letimile

Freedom, for me, means the lived experience of a life that has, in as much of its freedom, the same amount of accountability and responsibility. We tend to want the fruits of freedom without the responsibility of it, which makes me question if we really want and understand what true freedom is?

In our individual strengths, we are able to practice as much freedom as our lives and circumstances allow. Our freedom is sometimes defined by others because we live in a patriarchal and oppressive system that hasn't learnt how to live and let live with freedom.



sex as an entire body experience

by Makgosi Letimile

Living as a Disabled single woman has meant that I have had to learn to take care of all my sexual needs. That doesn't cover kissing though – in the age of technology, everything is seemingly possible, but there are some sexual experiences that would need teamwork, so we'll wait until I manifest somebody amazing in my life for that one. But we make it work, as the Disabled and creative.

I'm an independent reviewer of sex toys for Disabled women, and I use my body to experiment with all kinds of sensualities. This has led to some interesting trials with tech-advanced toys and nipple clamps.

Heteronormativity has taught us that sex is a genitalia-only experience, which might explain the violence against the Queer of this world (or the Alphabet gang as we are called). Yet our sex lives are lit – you're just busy hating from the outside because you are not coming. That's my story and I'm sticking to it.

Enough of the dragging of the straights, more about my nipple clamps.

I wore them for two consecutive days, and I'm wearing them as I write this, observing my breasts reacting differently to the pressure. Yesterday, the pinch in my right breast, with the pain that followed after, was like a charge to the glands. I consider myself a pleasure and pain slut, so this is a good, arousing experience for me.

The left breast felt like nothing had changed, but I later realised that it was because the clamp kept falling off. After switching the clamps around, I felt the nerves in my left breast pull, almost as if they were stretching. It made me wonder, do we ever entirely listen to our bodies when we are having sex or do the minor details get lost in the play? Would I have noticed this subtle pull if I had a partner's mouth on my nipple? Maybe, but I can't guarantee it, and I doubt that using teeth would have the same result. This felt like a new lesson to me about my body, again, and how it's always an entire body experience...

My Disability, and my quest towards a better functioning body whose pleaure isn't dictated by my legs not working, has led to a learning and understanding of what it is like to have sex that, even if is not partnered, still manages to be inclusive and pleasurable. Maybe one day I might meet somebody who is not intimidated by my understanding of my sexuality -- if they are, they have no place in my life. What our manifestations will not do is get us partners who are going to judge us for our indulgence, instead of doing what they said they are here to do – to love us. The Feminist Gods don't set us up for failure.

who were they?

by Makgosi Letimile

Content note: mentions of police brutality, ableism.

Covid-19 has brought the world to a standstill, but has also managed to shake the world on its very axis. As we are forced to experience a pandemic, both on and offline, I have no doubt that if we didn't have the internet, we all wouldn't be here –and that includes the creation of this zine. In different ways and to varying extents, most of the world is experiencing this virus and its effects at the same time -- thanks to digital media, we are witness to each other's chaos and crisis.

And with all this access comes the constant heartache of seeing Black and Brown people being subjected to never-ending brutality – like I said, the world just keeps on moving, even as it feels like it might be ending. With a number of countries instituting lockdown measures to curb the spread of Covid-19, it also means that the Disabled are imprisoned by a virus, and by society as a whole. Society tends to forget about the Disabled. It's not a new experience – there are homes where the Disabled have been left by family and friends, never to be seen again. History has repeated itself many times over and it still has to change. Until then, the Disabled have to see to it that the world doesn't also forget them online.

In the chaos that Covid-19 has caused, Nathaniel Julius, a 16-year-old boy with Down Syndrome, was shot to death by the South African police for being outside, eating a biscuit and being non-verbal. He was non-communicative and he was killed. At the time, I was sitting in my house trying to ignore the heavy ache that set in my bones when I realised that he was probably isolating at home, and that the one time he had a chance to be outside, he was met with a bullet from the state. In my grief and my fury I then turned to the sadness of not knowing who he was, and who he could have been.

I didn't know the young man. We probably would have never crossed paths in the outside world, but the internet introduced me to him, and I wanted to know who he was, as a Disabled young man in one of the poorest communities in South Africa. I wanted to know what his personality was like, what he liked to eat, what songs he danced to, what made his eyes glimmer and what put a smile on his face. I wanted to know who he was to his family and how they would describe him. All I knew was that he was a non-communicative 16-year-old who was killed by an ableist system.

And I wonder how other families and friends would describe the Disabled people in their lives that they may have left behind, during and before the pandemic. I became Disabled in 2016; I think that 2020 and Covid-19 are the ableist's world's great reckoning with Disability. For months, everybody knew what it was like to be denied this particular aspect of their humanity, and having to learn to live with it. People claimed to understand what being Disabled was like because they wanted to go outside and couldn't. They were able to empathize for all of 48 hours before everybody started mentioning how a WHO sanctioned lockdown was abusing their rights. I've been observing the people in my life, and in society in general, and I want to ask them: besides our Disabilities, how else would you tell our stories if we were to be shot for going outside while Disabled?

elegy for self

by Makgosi Letimile

Being alone for years taught me to neglect myself emotionally because I had no place to go the last time my grief lost a home.

Somebody once said grief is Love that has no place to go. And I understood immediately because there was love once in my life, and when it left, I grieved for myself and my homeless love.

I loved and lost. And I feared loss, because the road to recovery was so lonely I didn't know if I could risk it again. I've lived to regret it several times over.

And now I'm back, asking love to make me its fool once again.

This new-old journey hasn't been without its challenges. Every once in a while I wake up in a panic, fearing that maybe if I showed too much need, I might not see my Lover again. And everyday they have taken the time to show in actions and words that they want to be here. So I'm going to throw caution to the wind and tell love to take me for a fool one more time. If I meet with grief on the way, it will be okay; because when the love was here, it really showed up this time.

Still
oppressed
Still
loving

A guide to accessing mental health care

By Nyambura 'Mike' Mutanyi

There you are minding your business (or are you, if you are depressed/ anxious/ suicidal?)

Let's start again.

There you are. You've not quite been yourself for a bit and you can't seem to shake it off. What now? It seems you could do with some help to get you out of the fog and get a little sunshine in.

Who are you gonna call?

Or maybe you're here because someone you care about hasn't quite been themselves lately and you don't really know what to do. This is for you, too (and thank you!).

This is intended as a primer on getting mental health help in Kenya and similar countries. It's not definitive (is anything?) but it's a chance to have certain conversations, ask questions, and figure out how you want to navigate the mental health labyrinth.

And who are you?

I'm Nyambura 'Mike' Mutanyi and I have some first- and second-hand experience with the Kenyan mental health landscape. There are some things I wish I'd known before I went in, and I hope this helps someone who finds themselves in my position.

I also know we live in a world where mental health issues are stigmatised and capitalism means we're driven to be productive at all costs, and told we're not important if we're not "adding value." So I'd like to take this opportunity to say:

If you're feeling down, there are some immediate & short term things you could do:

Immediate

- Speak to a friend. This could be tricky, because maybe the reason you're feeling out of it is that you're (feeling) friendless, or you've been isolating yourself and have strained your relationships.

- Call a helpline. In Kenya, you can reach out to Befrienders (+254 722 178 177) and Niskize (0900 620 800).

Short term

- Once you speak to someone, you'll probably need to see a professional. You could speak to a counsellor or a doctor.

- If you are under 25, you can see a mental health practitioner at Kenyatta National Hospital for free. For those over 25, KNH and other national hospitals provide low-cost (1000 KES or less) counselling services and subsidised psychiatric services.

- Think of counselling or your first visit to a psychiatrist as first aid – a way to get some space to breathe.

We've talked about where to start but maybe you're wondering how to start. This can be a fraught venture, especially for those of us who are ordinarily on the margins (because we're disabled, queer, gender non-conforming, not of the majority religion and more).

In Kenya, public hospitals that offer psychological and psychiatric services will often require that one passes through a general practitioner (GP) before they are referred to a specialist. This means that entering the public mental health system will require that you talk to at least two doctors on your first visit.

Some things that help:

- Dress comfortably: mental health settings can be uncomfortable sometimes but clothes that you feel good in and shoes that help you feel rooted can help ground you.

- Take someone along if you can – sometimes one needs a friend or family member to speak for and with them and that's ok!

- If you can, have a script for the conversation you will have with the doctor. Something along the lines of "I have been _____ (sleeping a lot/ thinking of harming myself/ drinking too much/ been unable to sleep etc.) and I think I may be going through a mental health illness".

- If you've done some research into your symptoms, you can bring this up during your consultation ("I think I may be depressed because _____"). This offers a chance for you and the doctor to work together towards a solution. Don't stress about this, though – it's often enough to report your symptoms and say how you're feeling/ acting.

- Set aside a day or morning during which you can see the doctor. First visits can take a long time and it helps if you don't have a long list of things you need to do that day. Seeking mental health services can be hard to explain but if you can get the morning or day off school or work, it'll make for a smoother experience.

- Having some money: First consultations will usually cost a little more than subsequent ones. Please ask ahead – or ask the person you'll be going with to ask ahead – about the costs and accepted modes of payment at the hospital you'll be visiting. Some places only accept bank cards and/ or mobile money such as M-Pesa and it helps to know this in advance so you're not scrambling.

Once you've spoken to the doctor, you'll probably be sent for some tests. Sometimes, other physical conditions can present in the same way as mental health issues (thyroid conditions, anemia or pregnancy, for instance) so these tests will usually be done as a way to exclude these issues.

After you're referred to a psychologist or psychiatrist, you'll have an intake session where you'll be expected to go over the symptoms you shared earlier. This is where a friend or family member can be helpful – especially if your condition means you're agitated or otherwise out of it. They'll usually then prescribe medicine for you for a short period (say, two weeks) and ask you to return for review.

And that's your first visit done!

You talked about money before... say more.

Right, money.

Unless you're living in a country with comprehensive universal healthcare, or something close to it, you'll need some money to deal with your mental health condition. Medicine, doctor's consultations, therapy all cost money.

"Caring for myself is not self-indulgence. It is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare." - Audre Lorde in A Burst of Light: And Other Essays

In Kenya, psychiatric services can cost as little as 50 KES ($0.50) for a return visit at Mathare to 10 000 KES ($100) at a superstar psychiatrist's office. Medicine may be generic and subsidised at some public hospital pharmacies (KNH, Mathare) or be expensive brand names at private pharmacies.

If you have private medical insurance, it helps to contact your provider and find out which professionals you can access and the limits of the cover. For a lot of people, mental health issues can be stressful, so no one wants to also have to worry about having to pay for pricey services out of pocket.

My doctor advises that I see a psychotherapist – how do I find one?

If you're like the vast majority of Kenyans, you probably don't have private medical insurance. You may have NHIF, though this doesn't cover some mental health services. The mention of a psychotherapist can feel overwhelming, and it's one more thing to spend money on...

Useful tips:

- Asking for recommendations from the referring professional: mental health professionals often speak to each other so your psychiatrist may be able to point you to one. Some psychiatrists also have joint practices with psychotherapists and that may be your first stop.

- Seeking psychotherapy at public hospitals – these services are often subsidised and start at 500 KES ($5) a session.

- Asking friends and family. Because folks don't usually talk about mental health (we'll talk about disclosure later), you may find that the people close to you can point you to psychotherapists that are a good fit. Sometimes the old "asking for a friend" does the trick if you're unsure about the reception you might get.

- If you have private insurance, looking up your insurer's list of approved psychotherapists is useful. Pair this with some research of your own (online, among friends) to get one that you stand a chance at having a good therapeutic relationship with.

- Seeking resources online – some listings such as Mental Health Service Providers We Can Trust offer a starting point for seeking psychotherapists in a setting where the price is transparent.

- Looking up resources shared on social media and blogs can also be helpful. Social media can also be helpful when one is sussing out which psychotherapist would work for them because people talk

Sometimes you may have to kiss a few frogs before you get the right match. That sucks – you want to focus on getting/ feeling better! But a good therapeutic relationship can make a world of difference.

Hang on!

What rights do I have?

- You have a right to know what treatment you are being given and to make decisions about it.

- You deserve to know what treatment will do to you – some drugs may have side effects that are particularly detrimental to you and it helps to highlight your concerns.

- You have a right to decline treatment – sometimes something just doesn't sit right in your spirit and that's fair.

- You have a right to privacy and fair treatment.

- If you live in a Commonwealth country like Kenya, this NHS (UK) guide may be useful.

Who do I tell, and why?

Telling people you are experiencing or have experienced mental health issues can be a scary venture – especially when stigma means that it may negatively impact your life to disclose this information.

Do what feels right and bear in mind what risks are acceptable for you versus the benefits that could be obtained.

In Kenya, for instance, you can access certain services (scholarships, tax rebates, quotas) if you're listed as disabled due to your mental illness. On the other hand, you may also find yourself denied certain opportunities when your disability is discovered.

[Ableism sucks!!!]

so make the decision that's safest for you.

For those of us at marginalised intersections (low or no income, queer, otherwise disabled, non-men), disclosing illness may further marginalize us. That's always something to consider.

But —

There are support groups such as USP Kenya one can join online and offline that can help you build community and stay connected to resources and knowledge. These spaces can be affirming and sustaining and, if you have the bandwidth, are a fantastic way to nurture connections that are supportive.

where do we go from here?

Remember that you're not alone - there are people who care about you and want you to stay alive and live well :)

If you can, plug into communities and learn about your condition(s) – it goes a long way in being empowered :)

Please share this and help populate it with more information and resources.

A Survival Guide For The Internet

By Mamello Sejake

Mello my love, here's what I have to say about the internet.

- When the time comes for you to embrace your queerness, you'll have a lot of support online. It'll help you navigate the ghetto.
- Your search history will be the first to out you. There's no reason to panic though.
- It's ok to enjoy porn. Don't shy away from taking the time to explore what porn sites have to offer. Have fun.
- Those positions you feel like you aren't qualified for, apply for them all. The internet will help you learn on the job.
- Use the internet to upskill.
- Use the internet to network.
- The internet will be one of your most generous teachers.
- In fact, it will be your bread and butter.
- You'll find community online.
- You'll learn to find and learn about some of the experiences that are possible for you online.
- You'll enjoy plenty of opportunities because you took the time to surf the world wide web.
- Online activism is a real form of activism.
- Wi-Fi is a great investment.
- It's ok to be whoever you want to be online.
- Your social media accounts belong to you.
- Your employees don't have the right to decide what you can and can't post online.
- Virtual connections are real connections.
- Hold people virtually.
- Send virtual hugs.
- Try virtual sex.
- Try playing online.
- You'll begin to find your feet as a domme online.
- And, you'll find your sub online.
- It's ok to get lost online reading suicide notes.
- The internet will be a great source of joy for you.
- Virtual conferences, meetings, lectures, consultations, therapy sessions, parties and dates will be a thing. One of the only ways to connect at some point.
- Don't let other people's online experiences dictate your own.
- Protect yourself.
- Treasure the time that you have with people in person. Get off of social media!
- Live. Don't let time pass you by while you're stuck scrolling.

Get writing

In our making of this e-zine, we had many free-writing sessions. Here are the writing prompts we used to think about the internet's role in sexuality and sexual expression, ecological justice and mental health and more. Try the prompts for yourself and in your communities.

Prompt 1 (courtesy of writer Ndinda Kioko)

Pay attention to the world around you, then collect at least three details/observations each day. Observe the way people move around you, the way they interact with things. Observe objects. How the light falls on things. Write them down in your journal or wherever you write things, and be as precise as possible. Avoid generic descriptions and observations. The sky is obviously blue. Avoid abstract language. Describing a dress as "pretty" doesn't give us much to see. It doesn't engage our senses. Compare that to: "She wore a yellow dress, sprinkled with flowers" There's more happening in this description.

Whatever observations you make, ask yourself if they appeal to sight, smell, touch, taste or hearing.

Here's a poem I love by William Carlos (for its precision)

so much depends upon
a red wheelbarrow
glazed with rainwater
beside the white
chickens

Prompt 2

Write 300-350 words of a how-to guide for your teenage self, or for a child in your life, on using technology of any kind. Write it in list or poetry form – no prose. Do not limit yourself to warnings and other "do nots". Consider joy. Consider resistance. Consider grief. Consider pleasure (sexual and non-). Consider curiosity. Consider the things you wish you/they would think about when interacting with people you/they know very well, and people you/they barely know.

Prompt 3

When asked what we would do if we could live without being afraid of the threat or actuality of violence, many women say that they would leave the house at night, wander around, probably notice things we did not have the privilege of noticing before. Write a 200-300 word description of the conditions you imagine are necessary for living your best life, personally and professionally, on the internet.

Prompt 4

Formulate a curse against the people or systems that have really, really pissed you off in the last month. Rage as much as you can. Use every language you can speak and/or write in. For an example, read Kisu na Wembe's "northlands curse" in protest of the eviction of people in Ruai and Kariobangi.

Prompt 5

What has physical distancing/ isolation/quarantine/lockdown changed about or revealed to you about:
a) your body?
b) your digital identities and politics?
c) your profession/work life?
d) the systems that sustain and support you?

Prompt 6

Write a paragraph about the first time you remember coming across the word 'accountability' – the context in which it was used, the meanings attached to it, and its afterlives, if accessible. How has your understanding of it changed/grown/ fallen apart, if at all, since then? What is your personal experience with processes of accountability?

Prompt 7

Disability is not always visible, and many people and institutions do not likely know the scope of it (e.g. what is considered a disability by your government or employer?) With this in mind, write out a conversation between your younger and your current self or between yourself and a child in your life addressing stereotypes about disability, including those about sex, sexuality and reproductive health. Write this in script/ dialogic format. It is ok to respond with "I don't know" to a question from either party, but consider (and share) what you would do to better your knowledge after this conversation.

Prompt 8

You are a paperweight on the desk of a mental healthcare provider. The patient is new here, but has seen other healthcare providers before this one and has been disappointed every time. Write about this disappointment, and then write what you think this new therapist/counsellor/psychologist/psychiatrist might suggest to mitigate previous harm/damage/confusion.

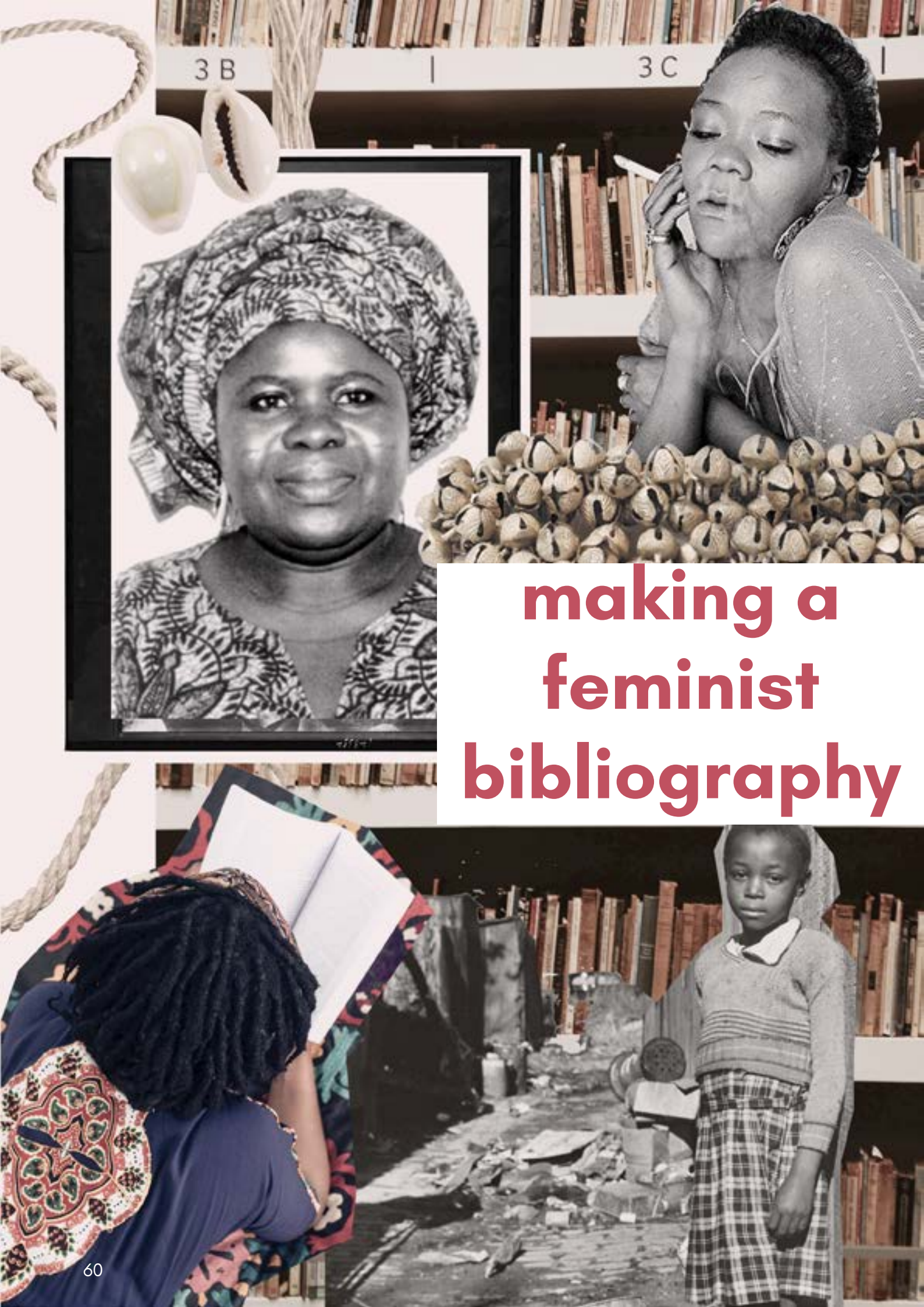
Prompt 9

Think back to the time your city or town first got wifi on a public-accessible scale, and how you felt about it. Juxtapose this with a written experience from the perspective of:
a) one of your ancestors, recently or not-so-recently deceased
b) a worker at a power station (Kenya Power, Eskom, Zesco)
c) a water body (river, lake etc) in your city/town
d) a cashier at a cellphone store

In all these, consider the ecological impact and/or implications.

Prompt 10

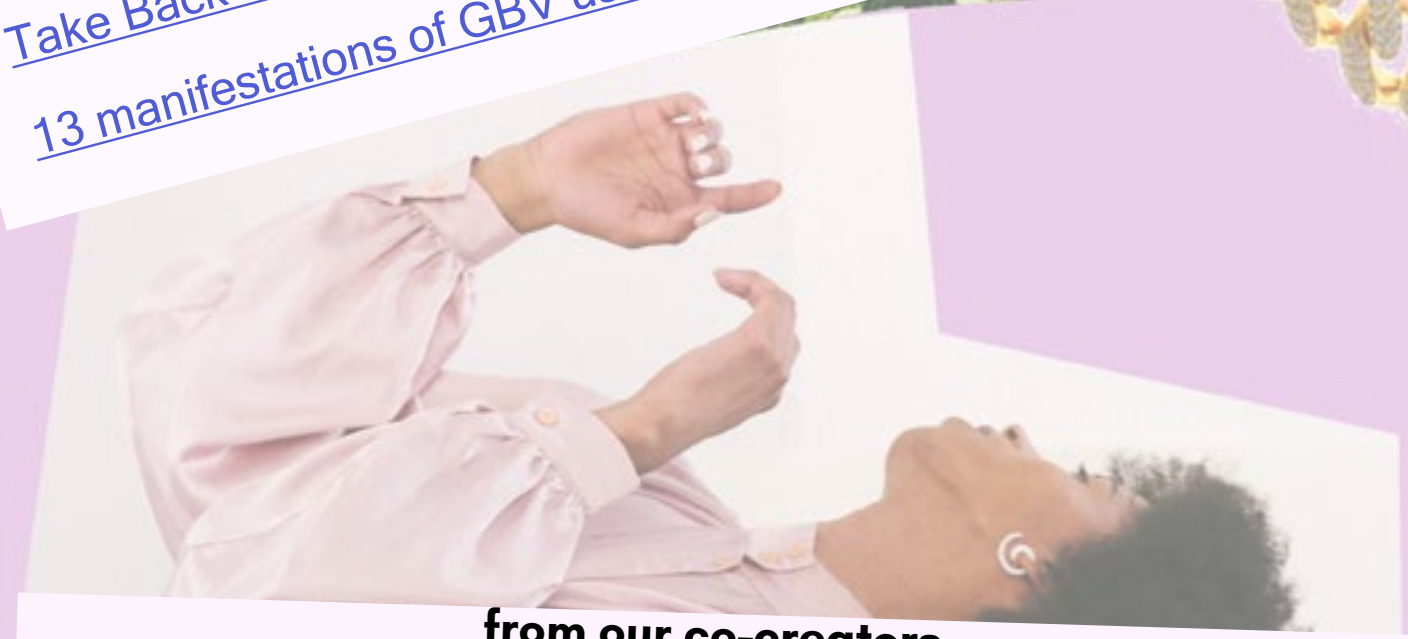
Write/draw a timeline, real or imagined, of your knowledge and/or education about your body. Any little detail matters, from what it was like to take a bath on your own for the first time to what it's like to walk in way-too-high shoes, but each one must centre feeling.



making a feminist bibliography

MFI Resources

- MFI Africa: the e-Zine (Edition 1)
- Feminist Principles of the Internet
- Take Back the Tech
- 13 manifestations of GBV using technology



from our co-creators

- Casting with the Feminist Witches
- Wheels n Toys
- Mike's 100 on Books
- Sexual Health for people living with disabilities (1 Sept 2020)
- When Disability and Inequality Meet in a Pandemic
- African Feminist and Anti-Capitalist Approach to Covid-19: Labour, Health and Ecological Questions
- Organising in the time of COVID-10: Eco-feminist Perspective
- Aisha Ali's Patron

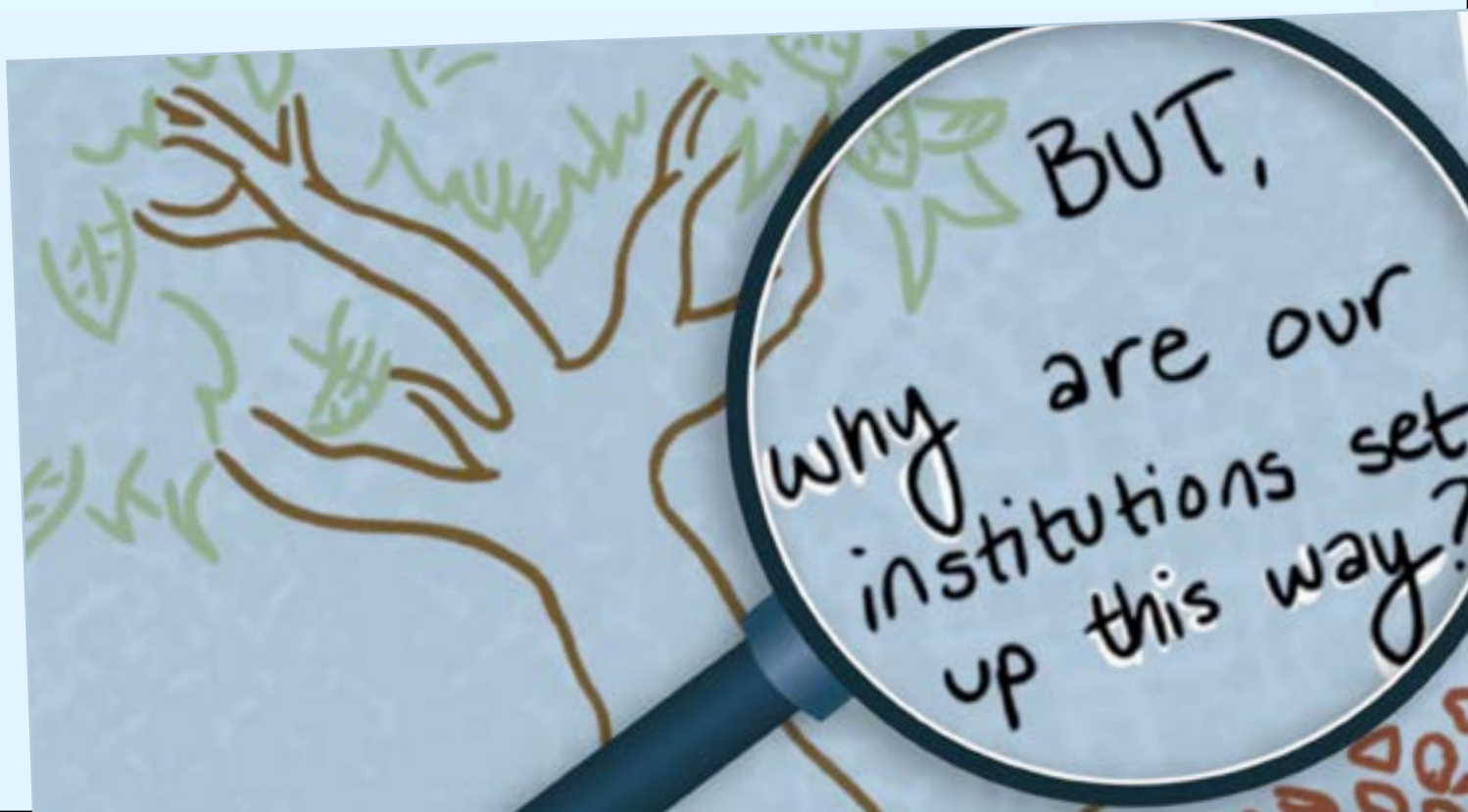
some zines we're loving

- Izwi Lethu: Adapting to Covid-19
- The Sex Worker Zine Project
- Fuck Your Health
- Open Letter to the Anti-rape Movement
- Rooted in Care, Sustaining Movements: Young Feminists for Climate Justice
- Principles for Design Justice
- Q-Zine
- practicing the future: journeys through science fiction and justice
- no selves to defend: poems about criminalization and violence against women
- spectrum.za
- Ja. Magazine

some other stuff we're into

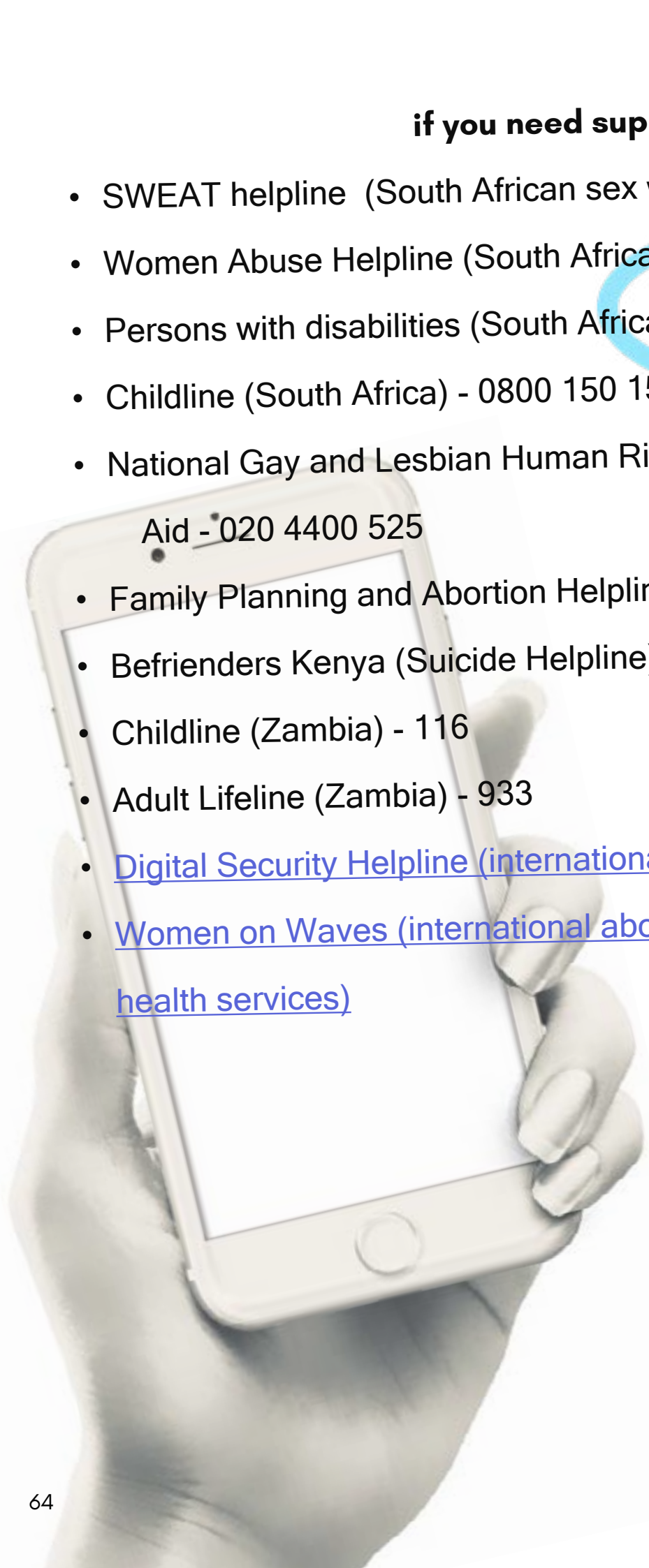
- Raising Kids Without Sexual Shame – AdventuresTV
- Parenting – Mutha Magazine
- Feminist Parenting: Perspectives from Africa and Beyond (book launch)
- Interrogating Pan-African Feminism Advocacy during Covid-19 and Beyond
- Underage and Legally Underprotected - A Report by the Kenya Sex Workers' Alliance (KESWA)
- Tuna Haki Pia: Disability Justice for Nairobi's Informal Settings
- Skin Stories -- On Disability, Sexuality and Gender

- The Wildness, with Tiff and Manda
- Adventures from the Bedrooms of African Women
- HolaAfrica
- Why the world needs an African ecofeminist future
- Webcomic: The Internet's Footprint
- Design Justice: Towards an Intersectional Feminist Framework for Design Theory and Practice
- Design Justice Network Principles
- Designing for Accessibility and Inclusion
- In Conversation: Weaving Pan-Africanism at the Scene of Gathering
- black looks
- The Politics of Regeneration Part I
- The Politics of Regeneration Part II
- Tanzania Feminist Collective
- Poem about my rights
- On Audre Lorde's Legacy and the 'Self' of Self-Care



if you need support

- SWEAT helpline (South African sex workers) - 0800 60 60 60
- Women Abuse Helpline (South Africa) - 0800 150 150
- Persons with disabilities (South Africa), SMS ‘help’ to 31531
- Childline (South Africa) - 0800 150 150
- National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission Legal Aid - 020 4400 525
- Family Planning and Abortion Helpline (Kenya) - 0800 721 530
- Befrienders Kenya (Suicide Helpline) - +254 722 178 177
- Childline (Zambia) - 116
- Adult Lifeline (Zambia) - 933
- Digital Security Helpline (international)
- Women on Waves (international abortion and reproductive health services)



co-creators' bios

ǂ Nyambura 'Mike' Mutanyi is a Nairobi-based multidisciplinary artist, citizen archivist and communications maven. Their work includes Radio Kikuyu, the podcasts 2 Girls & A Pod and Corpus, 100 on Books (videos, podcasts and a blog on books) and writing on art, culture and social issues in various outlets. Find out more at cmutanyi.com/work. If you would like to support their work, their PayPal ID is paypal.me/cmutanyi.

ǂ Makgosi Letimile is a Disabled Mom with a penchant for Pleasure Toys and Marijuanas, A future Toy Shop owner who laughs at her own jokes. If you would like to support my work,

my PayPal ID is paypal.me/wheelsntoys.

‡ Ann Kay Holland is a feminist, writer, Podcaster and the co-founder of Sistah Sistah Foundation. She is a self taught Historian, a plant mum and a huge Beyoncé fan. Her work focuses on sexual and reproductive health and rights, and she specifically works with children and women. She's passionate about ending period poverty, rape culture and illiteracy. She's the annoying Feminist your local misogynist is intimidated by, she simply can't leave Feminism at the door. She has a feminist heart, Feminist mind and a very Feminist vagina. She also goes by the name Feminist Witch.

‡ Aisha is a feminist writer and organiser with over ten years experience in advocacy against gender based violence, particularly on Twitter. She has worked as a writer, editor and content creator for a number of organisations, and some of her writing has appeared in This is Africa, openDemocracy and African Arguments. She is a 2020 Global Advocate Fellow at Mama Hope, and a very dedicated cat-mother. She is also a member of the #WeAre52pc feminist collective. If you would like to support her work, please subscribe to her Patreon.

‡ Nosipho Vidima is a Human Rights Activist, Feminist, HIV Rights Activist and Womin Rights Activist. She currently works at SWEAT (Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Taskforce) as a Programme Manager. Her daily work is Human Rights of sex workers nationally, where she insures that sex workers are reached with a holistic approach to accessing their basic and fundamental rights while accessing justice and legal recourse in the legal system that marginalises most women

‡ Ruth Nyambura is a Kenyan eco-feminist and researcher working on the intersections of ecological justice in Africa.

Her work and activism uses a feminist political ecology lens to critically engage with the continent's and global food systems, challenging neoliberal models of agrarian transformation and amplifying the revolutionary work of small-holder farmers of Africa —the majority of whom are women—as well as rural agrarian movements offering concrete anti-capitalist alternatives to the ecological, economic and democratic crisis facing the continent· Nyambura is a founder of and convenes the African Ecofeminists Collective·

ǂ Mamello Sejake has been snatching edges, practising black magic, dropping gems like a careless jeweller and giving bigots the middle finger since 1991· If they were a bumper sticker it would read "tardy"· If they were movie genres, they'd be a kick-ass Black feminist Afrofuturistic fantasy series with an adventurous pro-dominatrix named Hunter and, a rom-com about everyone's favourite friend who has terrible taste in lovers· If they were a plant, they'd be fiery as African poison ivy and enduringly intense like a black tulip· If they were colours they'd be candy red, yellow and warm shades of lavender· Audacious· Outspoken· And compassionate· If they were birds, they'd be as curious as a songbird with a pear green back and as comically clumsy as a loon with a deep peacock green neckline· If they were a photo, they'd be Grace Jones in the 1987 Sun Country Tropical Cooler print ad· If they were songs, they'd be Macy Gray's Beauty in The World and Wildcookie's Touchy Touchy· Or Baz Luhrmann's Wear Sunscreen· The Mau Kilauea's Tropical remix· Obviously·

ǂ Tshiamo Tiger Maremela, also known as A VERY COOL TIME, is a non-binary Johannesburg-based artist and strategist using the internet and new media to make sense of the world· Maremela's multi-disciplinary practice includes music

production and DJing, collage-making, writing, photography, and video art. They are interested in exploring digital behaviour in post-colonial urban territories, the parallels and intersections of offline and online spaces, socio-political disruption through screen- and internet-based organising, the effects of digitality on identity, and the aesthetics and contextual landscape of African digital art.

‡ Consisting of Youlendree Appasamy and Wairimu Muriithi, No Sweetness Here is a zine-making duo based in Johannesburg, New York and wherever else life takes them. They started working together through Ja. Magazine, and they recently curated Making a Feminist Internet: The e-Zine, commissioned by the APC Women's Rights Programme. Wairimu and Youlendree work as feminist writers, editors, curators and researchers, and you can find some of their work on GenderIT, Down River Road, Mail & Guardian and Popula.

The end